



OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

May 21, 2015

The Honorable Rosie Mendez  
New York City Council Member  
173 Avenue B at 11<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York, NY 10009

Dear Councilman Mendez:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Lifeline recertification process in New York. I appreciate your interest in this matter and am pleased to provide the enclosed letter on this issue from the Chief of the FCC's Wireline Competition Bureau and our Managing Director.

If you have any additional questions or need any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to be "Tom Wheeler", is written over a horizontal line.

Tom Wheeler



Federal Communications Commission  
Washington, D.C. 20554

May 21, 2015

The Honorable Rosie Mendez  
New York City Council Member  
173 Avenue B at 11th Street  
New York, NY 10009

Dear Councilwoman Mendez:

Thank you for your letter expressing concerns regarding the Lifeline recertification process in New York. We share your concerns. The goal of the Lifeline program is to ensure that affordable communications services are available to low-income consumers, and our processes should support that goal. We take seriously the importance of the Lifeline program to those consumers, including those for whom English is not their first language. As explained below, we have already made changes to the recertification process so that consumers better understand the process, and we are also considering additional changes in response to these concerns.

The recertification process ensures that Lifeline support goes to qualifying consumers. By requiring providers to recertify that their subscribers remain eligible for the Lifeline benefit, we ensure that scarce resources are targeted to those consumers who need the service. In those cases where a state administrator does not perform recertification, the 2012 *Lifeline Reform Order* permits carriers either to recertify their customers directly or to utilize the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) to recertify customers on their behalf. USAC makes an effort to ensure that consumers understand their recertification obligations and the recertification process. If a provider elects for USAC to recertify its customers on its behalf, USAC sends a letter to each customer, in both English and Spanish, informing the customer of the obligation to recertify that he or she remains eligible for the Lifeline benefit. The letter explains the recertification process, how the consumer may confirm eligibility, and that the consumer has 30 days to complete the recertification, or he or she will no longer receive the Lifeline benefit. Consumers have three methods, in both English and Spanish, to respond to the recertification letter: (1) call a toll-free number and respond through an interactive voice response system; (2) recertify through a USAC-maintained recertification website; or (3) complete, sign, and return a recertification form via U.S. Mail. The consumer will also receive an automated call or text message in both English and Spanish during the 30-day period to encourage him or her to respond to the letter.

Despite USAC's efforts, we understand that some consumers may not have received or understood their recertification notices. This could be due to a variety of reasons, including that the consumers may have moved to a new address, English or Spanish (as you note) may not be accessible languages to them, or because they did not otherwise understand the notice. Consumers may also not recognize that a letter from USAC is related to their Lifeline benefit. Significantly, this is the first year that Verizon has elected to use USAC instead of performing recertification on its own. Therefore, the majority of Verizon's subscribers were unfamiliar with USAC's process, which may differ from Verizon's process from prior years or the process of other providers.

After hearing similar concerns in late March, FCC staff directed USAC to make changes to

the recertification process for the coming year to ensure that consumers receive their recertification notice and better understand both the consequences of not responding to the recertification letter and the process for re-enrolling in Lifeline if they are de-enrolled. If USAC determines that a subscriber was not able to recertify his or her eligibility within the 30-day period, for example, it will send an automated text or call to the subscriber informing the consumer that he or she will no longer receive the Lifeline benefit for failure to complete the recertification process and also explaining how the consumer can re-enroll in the program.

While we are confident that these changes to the recertification process will alleviate some of the issues raised in your letter, we are also considering additional changes to address your concerns. Specifically, we are examining ways that USAC can better identify itself to consumers, so consumers understand USAC's role in the recertification process. We are also examining whether USAC should provide recertification notices and opportunities to respond to the recertification attempt in languages other than English and Spanish. We will continue to look for ways to improve our recertification processes and believe that these efforts, along with the reforms described above, will improve the Lifeline program for consumers.

We appreciate your interest in this matter. Please let us know if we can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

  
Julie A. Veach  
Chief, Wireline Competition Bureau

  
Jon Wilkins  
Managing Director



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The Honorable Mark Treyger  
New York City Council Member  
445 Neptune Avenue  
Community Room 2C  
Brooklyn, New York 11224

Dear Councilman Treyger:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Lifeline recertification process in New York. I appreciate your interest in this matter and am pleased to provide the enclosed letter on this issue from the Chief of the FCC's Wireline Competition Bureau and our Managing Director.

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The Honorable Paul Vallone  
New York City Council Member  
42-40 Bell Blvd #301  
Queens, NY 11361

Dear Councilman Vallone:

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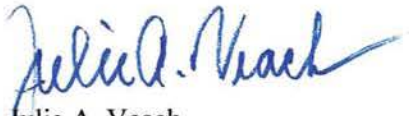


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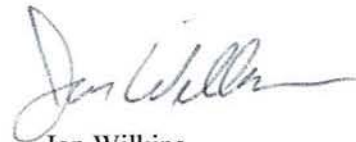
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New York City Council Member  
73-03 Bell Boulevard  
Oakland Gardens, NY 11364

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